

Jarbidge: The Day the Earth Moved

By J.J. Johnson

It was an historic moment, indeed. I could hash out the same details you've read from other news sources about what happened in Jarbidge, Nevada on July 4th, 2000, but that wouldn't give you the whole picture. The Sierra Times.com story on the event could have been reported from the second the first rock was moved.

But we don't have a satellite truck, and the nearest internet-ready phone line was a whole time zone way. We're working on it.

By the way, something happened in that Canyon that was much bigger than moving a rock - something that I believe has the federal government a bit concerned.

Instead of giving you the regular version, I'll just report what happened to us during our trip. This will expose some of the lies you've already seen from some media sources, and give a few details that weren't reported. You've heard reports of heavy law enforcement in the area in case of any "problems." Yes, they were there, and we had quite a few run-ins with them. Let me explain our trip to Jarbidge, Nevada.

It was a break-neck, brown-knuckle ride from Anaheim, California to Three Creek, Idaho - via Pahrump, Nevada. Mode of transportation: One RV with a van in tow. Someone else can figure out the mileage. I'm too exhausted. On July 4th at 3:30am Idaho Time, I arrived at the Three Creek schoolhouse. We were told this was where the media would gather. This was my second run in with law enforcement.

The first was a minor tail-light problem on I-80. No ticket.

At the Three Creek School Yard, I was met by a flashlight in the hand of an Owahee County (Idaho) Sheriff Deputy. I had apparently made a wrong turn.

"Sorry sir, but this is the law enforcement area. The media and the other folks are camping across the road," the deputy said calmly. He then gave me the real bad news:

"And you can't loop your way out of here. You'll have to back out of here since all the officers are sleeping right now..."

Forget the fact that backing an RV with a van in tow back through a tight gate is nearly impossible and not recommended to anyone. His statement gave the first clue that something wasn't adding up. Let's go over this.

You all heard that tons of law enforcement were to be there in case any of those evil, anti-government militia, skinheads, neo-Nazis environmental wackos, etc. were to DARE show their faces anywhere at this event. There was a good chance for violence, remember? Burn this in your brain as you continue reading: Common sense would dictate that all the cops there would be on a hair trigger, right?

They were asleep.

The next morning, we were all awakened by the sounds of school busses revving to take the armada of people into Jarbidge Canyon. We took our van instead. Winding down a dirt road into a valley carved out by the Good Lord Himself we saw several more law enforcement personnel. The Nevada Highway Patrol

was along the road making sure traffic got through. Each time, we got a friendly wave. This changed once we passed the little town of Jarbidge.

"Sorry sir, no more room for cars in the work area," the Elko County Deputy said. "Just pull your car over here and hop on the bus, and have a good time. The deputies asked the bus driver to let our dogs ride the bus too. They did.

They were all in regular uniform, but the whole time, we're looking for folks in black suits, perhaps hiding near the top of the canyon waiting to jump on anyone for anything.

They weren't there. There were two reports of several Sheriff's deputy sniper positions at higher elevations, but in each case, it was explained that they were concerned not about the folks in the canyon, but about those "outsiders" who might come looking to make trouble.

For the record: only one organization gave any hint of causing trouble. It came in the form of a letter from the U.S. Justice Department back on June 9.

It was almost impossible to count the total number of people in attendance. To do so, the crowd from the day before had to be included, as well as those who were camped out in a 100 square mile area. Our estimates were about 2000 people. One of the organizers, Grant Gerber, estimated about 2500. But at the time of the rock moving, the crowd size had swelled to about 500 at the worksite.

After hats were removed, and the Pledge of Allegiance and a prayer was said, Nancy had the next run-in with law enforcement. She wore a shirt with a photo of a gun that said, "I don't dial 911." The quote from this Elko deputy was, "Like your shirt ma'am. My wife has one just like it."

Those of us with cameras scrambled into position to get that photo of the 5-ton rock that had to be moved at high noon. I found my spot between a Nevada state trooper and a CNN camera man. I slipped on another large rock just before the photo, and was grabbed - by the state trooper.

"Be careful, sir," was all he said.

The rock had been moved twice, then the chant from those holding the ropes for the next pull. We don't know who started the chant, but it came out in one word - "FREEDOM!" First it was just the men and women on the four ropes, then you could hear the words echoing throughout the canyon - freedom-Freedom -FREEDOM!

From my vantage point, I began to see grown men and women shed a tear or hold up fists. Even the CNN reporter began to smile. I began to wonder if she figured out why she was even there, yet.

After about the 4th pull, and the word "freedom" ringing in everyone's ears, I was in position for the perfect photo...

...so was another Elko County Deputy. We bumped into each other (shoulder to shoulder) trying to get the same photo. I said, "Pardon me, Officer," and he responded with:

"Is this great, or what?"

Nancy has said before that there was a time when people used to say, "Thank God the Police are here." Those days are long gone. But for this 4th of July outing, perhaps what happened in Jarbidge Canyon may bring those days back. There were no arrests. There were no complaints about law enforcement

whatsoever. In fact, it didn't take long for anyone to be convinced that these men and women behind the badges were clearly there that day to "Protect and Serve."

Consider this: in the face of all the reports (read: threats) of trouble coming to the canyon. This photo says it all. Were firearms present in the hands of civilians this day? Yes, plenty. This photo here was taken at the worksite. If there was such a threat of violence, then why wasn't I arrested right on the spot?

When I got off the horse, I wasn't arrested, or even given a warning. I was interviewed by the Elko Daily Free Press.

I wondered aloud to other people how they were going to report this historic event to the world. CNN reported, "several hundred anti-government protesters...". Strange, I didn't see anyone protesting. They were working - and they got the road opened. Another cheer rang out as Grandma C was the first to be driven across the re-opened South Canyon Road. The media scrambled around her as if they were her staff.

From there, we went to look at the remaining section of the road that had been destroyed by the United States Federal government. Anyone looking at the debris and destruction to that road would have been outraged. What this government (the USFS) had attempted to do, was force Nevadans to travel into Idaho just to enter their own state, and made any chance of fighting a fire in this area almost impossible - leaving the residents of Jarbidge helpless in an area more vulnerable to brush fires than even Los Alamos.

The next day, we left the Canyon and had our last, and most eye-opening run in with law enforcement. It was the same crew from Owahee County Idaho we met the first night. We were all at the gas station fueling up for the trip home. I had to put the question to them:

"Officers, exactly who told you there would be trouble in the canyon?"

"Oh, we just heard about it on the news, but the only people we were concerned with were the left wing environmental groups. They're the ones that usually do the most damage here in the northwest." Another officer said, "Personally, I think this whole 'bull trout' mess is bull****". One officer said, "that letter [from the U.S. Attorney] also had a lot of us concerned, but since there were no Forestry Service people here, there were no problems."

Oh yes, I begged him to go on the record with that, but he wouldn't.

This is the bigger story that came out of Jarbidge Canyon on July 4, 2000. There was no concern over so-called right wing, anti-government protesters. There was no concern over gun laws, and people bearing them openly. The only concern was over threats from the Federal Government and left-wing terrorists. I suspect CNN, ABC, and the AP failed to mention these facts that were obvious to all.

Now that it has been shown that people can and will take action in the face of federal bureaucracy, a new-found courage is growing in the west against the 'Roadless Initiative'. The talk throughout the camp area was that Southern Utah would be next, followed by other western areas deemed off-limits by the federal government in recent years. There was talk among the campsite dwellers about starting a compliment to the Tyranny Response Team called, "Roadless Response Teams." A Montana County

Commissioner stated that this event may give new life to the Western States Alliance, a new coalition of western counties organizing themselves to take on the Federal Government.

Jarbridge was just the beginning, and it is not over. To completely open the road for non-four-wheel drive traffic, heavier equipment will be needed. This is a decision that Elko County has to make. But let Independence Day, July 4, 2000 be known as "The day the earth was moved" - not only in the canyon, but in the hearts and minds of thousands of Western Americans. You will hear of other areas out west putting bodies where they are needed to enforce county Jurisdiction over their roads.

And Sierra Times will be there.

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